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ABSTRACT

Bob Algozzine et al. studied Florida's minimum competency testing as a requirement for high school graduation and wrote a report titled "Analysis of Basic Skill Competencies of Learning Disabled Adolescents," from which this one-page summary was prepared. The study sample included 938 regular class students and 1,098 learning-disabled students, all in 10th grade. Their performance scores on item clusters on the State Student Assessment Test II were analyzed and compared, and results showed that learning-disabled students demonstrated competence on fewer communications and mathematics skills than their regular class peers. In addition, an employer survey was administered to 279 corporation personnel managers. Ninety-two percent of employers indicated that reading, writing, and solving number problems, in that order, were important in the jobs available for high-school graduates. The study's teaching implications support continued reliance on basic skill instruction and development of instructional goals for more complex skills deemed useful by employers. For policymakers, continued emphasis on programming to narrow the gap between the demonstrated skills of learning-disabled students and their regular class peers is recommended. (JDD)

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RESEARCH & RESOURCES ON SPECIAL EDUCATION

ABSTRACT VII
APRIL 1987

MINIMUM COMPETENCY TESTING AND EMPLOYABILITY OF LEARNING DISABLED ADOLESCENTS

Minimum competency testing as a requirement for high school graduation is an issue of concern with respect to handicapped students, especially since test results can affect a student's future job placement by determining whether or not he or she receives a diploma. Gains made by handicapped students could be "washed out" by lack of special consideration when minimum competence is tested. In Florida, state statutes allow appropriate modifications in testing instruments and procedures in order to ensure that the results of testing represent the student's achievement rather than reflecting his or her impairment.

Analysis of Basic Skill Competencies of Learning Disabled Adolescents is a study funded by the U.S. Department of Education that addresses two questions regarding Florida's minimum competency testing: (1) Does the performance of learning disabled students on the State Student Assessment Test-II differ from the performance of nonhandicapped students? (2) Does the test measure skills required by employers?

METHOD

Approximately 106,000 tenth grade students in 67 school districts were tested. Of these, 938 regular class students and 1,098 learning disabled students were randomly selected as the study sample. Their performance scores on item clusters (e.g., reading, writing, mathematics) were analyzed and compared.

In addition, an employer survey was administered to 279 personnel managers of corporations likely to hire recent high school graduates. These respondents were selected proportionally on the basis of community demographics to represent the 67 school districts. The survey contained 36 items regarding skills necessary to perform jobs. For example, employers were asked if their employees were required to read on the job, and if so, the extent to which various reading skills, such as following written directions, were required. The reading section was followed by two other sections related to the use of writing and mathematics by employees. Employers answered on a five-point scale ranging from very often to very rarely.

RESULTS

On the SSAT-II, learning disabled students demonstrated competence on fewer communications and mathematics skills than their regular class peers. In reading, learning disabled students performed better on skills requiring the literal use of words, symbols, and numbers than on skills requiring application of knowledge. Their performance on items involving recall of facts or literal recall was better than their performance on items involving drawing conclusions or analyzing text. In writing, learning disabled students' lowest scores were on business letters and their highest scores were on skills using money orders or checks. In math items, learning disabled students' performance on items identifying monetary equivalents, whole number operations, and using tables and graphs was better than their skills in items involving the application of mathematics in problem solving (e.g., measurement, fractions, interest).

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Employers' ratings of the extent to which various skills were required in the workplace supported the importance of competence in basic skills and functional literacy. Ninety-two percent indicated that reading, writing, and solving number problems were important in the job(s) available for high school graduates within their businesses. In general, reading was considered slightly more important than writing, which was rated more important than doing math.

TEACHING IMPLICATIONS

Continued reliance on basic skill instruction for learning disabled students seems appropriate. In addition, it appears appropriate to develop instructional goals for more complex skills deemed useful by employers and to develop instructional methods for use within the classroom (e.g., peer teaching, direct instruction) to maximize gains in competency skills.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS

Information on the basic skills competence of learning disabled students is valuable as a measure of the effectiveness of educational programs and should provide administrators and other policy makers with targets for instructional improvement. The authors of this study conclude that continued emphasis on programming to narrow the gap between the demonstrated skills of learning disabled students and their regular class peers is warranted. Providing policy makers with information about the strengths and weaknesses of learning disabled students and the importance of those skills as perceived by employers should be a valuable benchmark for the evaluation of special education programming and curricula planning.

Analysis of Basic Skill Competencies of Learning Disabled Adolescents. Final Report. May, 1986. 63 pp. U.S. Department of Education Grant No. GOO8402050. Bob Algozzine, W. Bee Crews, and Kim Stoddard, University of Florida. Available for $.78 (microfiche) or $5.55 (hard copy), plus postage, from ERIC Document Reproduction Service, 3900 Wheeler Avenue, Alexandria, VA 22304 (1-800-227-3742). Order EC Number 191 775.

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